

# The Ballarat Naturalist

February 2011



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## CANNING STOCK ROUTE – ROD AND JAN ORR

At the December 2010 meeting Rod Orr took members along the Canning Stock Route featuring the natural and social history of the route with a quick succession of slides.



Leaving home on 1st June and reaching their departure point along the Canning Stock Route on the 15th, they were away for a total of two and a half months and travelled a total of 10,000 km spending five and a half to six weeks traversing the 1780 km of the stock route. All of this with no access to fuel or provisions so all the food, fuel and drinking water for the trip needed to be carried from the start. Rod carried 100 litres of fuel in addition to the 125 litres in the tank and 90 litres of water. The convoy for the trip comprised two Nissan Patrol vehicles and one Prado each with a sand flag for visibility. Most people attempting the trip apparently travel from south to north but this trip was made in the reverse direction starting at Billiluna, south of Halls Creek where supplies could be topped up before travelling down to Wiluna. The stock route traverses aboriginal area so a permit costing \$65 is required to make the trip. The trip could be done in less time but then we would not have had all the beautiful pictures enhancing the talk.

Amongst the many pictures shown were desert fungi, spinifex ants nests, green flowering mistletoe on mulga, Wolf Creek meteor crater (the second biggest in the world at 880m across), desert oaks, spinifex, Wickham's Grevillea, Melaleuca glomerate, a sunset near Well 44 and many, many more. An interesting series of pictures showing three stages of the Desert oak were shown. There is a wiry tangle when young, a spire as an

intermediate stage with the third stage being a traditional tree shape. The comment was made that few reptiles were seen. However, there was little searching at night. There were a lot of dingos.

Before reaching the Stock Route a path was taken up the Tanami Track spending 2 nights along the track with lots of picture opportunities and lovely reflections at Lake Gregory.

Alfred Canning surveyed the route commencing in 1906 and sank a total of 52 wells with many sources being located with the forced assistance of aborigines who were captured and restrained without water, then followed when released. In all the route was only used for a maximum of about 40 years as a stock route. Along the stock route wells are in various states of repair, some for example Well 49 are restored with the water looking good and with good information signs. Well 46 even has a windlass. Other wells, for example Well 48 are completely derelict. In some cases inconsiderate people have left fuel drums spoiling the vista. There is little surface water and what there is, generally is polluted by camels. There are many dry lakes.

The average distance between the wells is about 20k. Speed travelled on bad parts was as low as a walking pace and at other times up to 50 – 60 km/hr. Sometimes people passed going much faster but with much greater risk of damage. More than 900 sand hills were crossed only being bogged once. There was one worrying time when an oil warning light came on and stayed on. With the benefit of modern technology a satellite phone call was made to a Bendigo service centre who advised that if there was oil in the engine it was most likely an indicator fault as they did not get oil pump failure but occasionally the warning system failed. As it turned out, later in the day the light decided to switch off.

One of the things that had to be limited on the trip was reference books. Those taken included a Key to Australian Grasses, Flora of Central Australia, Flora of Australia Mistletoe Vol 22.

For those of us without the vehicle or courage to take on a trip of this nature this was an interesting story and a great look at this part of our country. It was also an inspiration to see what we can do of the outback, even if we cannot take on something as ambitious as the Canning Stock Route. Thank you Rod and Jan for taking the time to put together this comprehensive story of your experiences and observations of the trip.

*Peter Dalman*

## SWAN SIGHTINGS

Early in December three swans with collar tags around their necks were seen at Lake Wendouree. I sent the details of the birds to University of Melbourne. They emailed back a web address: <http://iss.insightfulsystems.com.au/blackswan/sighting.php> which can be used to enter details of sightings of swans with collar tags.

I received back a brief history of the swans. G75 and G92 are both females. G92 was first caught in Ballarat in 2000 so this bird is now at least ten years old, and G75 is at least nine years old. G45 is a bird first captured in 2008 at Albert Park Lake. At least one other swan has flown between Lake Wendouree and Port Phillip Bay.

Unfortunately the data base only contains swans banded with neck tags by University of Melbourne researchers. It does not include swans banded with leg tags at Lake Wendouree. Please use this site to record information of collar-tagged swans you see as this will build up more knowledge of the movement of swans. If you do not have access to a computer, you could give me the information of swan collar tag number, time, date and location and I will enter the data.

*John Gregurke*

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## CLUB EXCURSION TO LAL LA FALLS - DECEMBER 2010

Twenty one people met at Lal Lal Falls at 2.00 on December 5th for an afternoon excursion and a picnic tea.

We visited Lal Lal two years ago, December 2009 and there was no water at all flowing over. But Sunday it was in full flood, and the wonderful sound of falling water was never out of hearing. We walked along the south bank passing many wildflowers including native veronicas, hosts of wahlenbergias, then through a grove of wonderfully dense and green sweet bursaria, and ended near a single clump of sweet hounds tongue, an insignificant little flower but with a very strong perfumed presence. A pair of wedgetails performed overhead at the very spot the local Wuthaurung people regarded as the eagles' ancestral home. It was a bird count day too for BOCA and the four members on the excursion compiled the list at the end of this report.



We had shared Lal Lal with other visitors but our next stop Moorabool Falls, was ours alone as after the recent months of rain the 2 ½ km walking track which connects the two falls was horribly overgrown. Moorabool Falls has been under public care since 1857 when the Ballarat Star campaigned to retain it in public ownership. The falls are in the midst of land owned by various water boards and trusts, but as Elspeth had a key to the gate we had an easy walk down to them.



The water falls over a 27 metre drop formed by two layers of a viscous lava sourced from Clarks hill, (which is where today's river also comes from). Although a single drop, the existence of a thick layer of heavy clay between the two flows has produced a fern lined ledge, almost a cave, behind the fall. The stream here is deeper above the fall than at Lal Lal and a solid stream of clear brown water fell down amidst the broken up froth.

Because rivers act as channels for spreading seeds; weeds, hemlock in particular dominated the valley floor. There were a few attractive plants on the valley sides, a very late stand of bulbine lilies, growing much taller than many of us had every seen and some matts of prickly woodruff. A very attractive cream froth of seeds amongst the paddock grasses unfortunately turned out to be the notorious and noxious serrated tussock!

From there we drove almost to Ballan and Bostocks reservoir. What a lovely place, the sweep of the low retaining wall and the fall of the spillway are really beautiful. The superb European trees that lined the



drive up to the reservoir were all grown at the Barwon Water nursery.

The overflow over the spillway had obviously quite recently been much higher. Peter Dalman estimated that the spillway was about 7 metres wide, and the water running over it was about 3 cm deep and at about 1 metre a second. Maybe 210litres per second outflow.

Bostocks is one of Barwon Waters newest dams. Built on the site of some old bluestone quarries it was not begun till 1953. It took only a year to build and water ran over that beautiful spillway by the end of winter 1955! And it only cost only £ 312,000! A real post war project; Victor Ceitz the onsite trust engineer came to Australia as a German internee and the work crew were mainly European migrants too. We missed seeing the impressions of various European coins pressed into the concrete of the water outlet!

Just at the entrance to the water reserve is the Ballan Mineral Water reserve. It should be far better known than it is because its water is actually not too bad, drinkable even by people who detest Daylesford spa waters. Recently renovated there are two timber pavilions and two springs with new fittings. The website [www.mineralwater.vic.gov.au](http://www.mineralwater.vic.gov.au) has much fascinating information about the Ballan spa and the composition of its mineral water as well as all the other hundreds of spas all over Victoria. It suggests that being downstream of the reservoir has helped maintain the presence of the spring.

From there we progressed to the Moorabool reservoir for a picnic tea. Moorabool was built in 1915 and it too has superb European style gardens. After tea we strolled across to the spillway and a group photograph and then headed homewards. In the case of the report writer it was to our own private waterfall. Heavy storms over Beaufort area had produced a fall of over 57mm in 20 minutes in the catchment area just upstream of our place. The flooded creek overtopped our small dam and raged across the spillway of the big one on its way down to the Beaufort Lake, aka. Goldfields Reservoir. The three creeks that sneak through Beaufort to join the Mt Emu Creek and eventually the Hopkins river all burst their banks and caused lots of damage in town.

*Elizabeth Thurgood, text and photographs*

**Bird Count Lal Lal -West Moorabool falls** Aust. Wood Duck, Whistling Kite, Wedge-tailed Eagle, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Crimson Rosella, Striated Pardalote, Red Wattle bird, Yellow-faced Honeyeater, Aust. Magpie, Little Raven, Magpie Lark, Welcome Swallow, Grey Fantail. **Bostock Reservoir:** Grey Teal, Aust. Darter, Great Cormorant, Whistling Kite, Crimson Rosella, Laughing Kookaburra, Superb Fairywren, Yellow-faced Honeyeater, White-eared Honeyeater, White-naped Honeyeater, Grey Shrike-thrush, Aust. Magpie, Grey Currawong, Little Raven, Yellow Robin. **Moorabool Reservoir:** Aust. Shelduck, Pacific Black Duck, Aust. Magpie, Grey Fantail, Grey Currawong, Common Blackbird, Grey Shrike-thrush.

*From Greg Binns*



Field Naturalists Club of Ballarat Incorporated  
No. A0014919P                      ABN 13 150 403 135  
**Minutes of the General Meeting - 3rd December 2010**

**Opening and Apologies.**

The President, Elspeth Swan, opened the meeting and welcomed 30 members and visitors.

**Minutes of previous meeting** (October) were summarised in the November Ballarat Naturalist.

**Business Arising** from previous minutes: nil.

**Correspondence.**

**IN:**

- Minister for Water: reply to Lake Wendouree submission.
- City of Ballarat: Lake Wendouree feasibility workshop; acknowledgement of receipt of Industrial Areas submission.
- Rene Hooper: Offer of Vol 1-4 Black's Flora of South Australia.
- Various: Acceptance/apologies for Stella Bedggood Memorial Lecture .
- Angair: SEANA Autumn Camp, 25-28 March 2011.
- VNPA: Appeal. / CSIRO Publishing: Catalogue.
- City of Ballarat: Future Industrial Areas.
- BEN: "Is Biodiversity off the Radar?" Thursday 25 November 2010 from 4-6pm.

**OUT:**

- Rene Hooper: Thanks for permanent loan of *Flora of South Australia*.
- DSE: Fire Operations Plan comments.
- Primary Industry Training Centre: Meeting dates for 2011.
- Lorraine Fink and Family: Sympathy card for passing of Lyndsay Fink.

Business Arising from Correspondence: Dealt with by Committee.

**Reports**

Treasurer's Report: Opening Balance: \$5622.27; Income: \$31.50; Expenses: \$60.68; Closing Balance: \$5593.09. *Moved: Les Hanrahan; Seconded: Ken Hammond. Carried.*

**General Business**

- Excursion Sunday 5 December
- Christmas break-up on Friday 17 December at Carol Hall's,
- Corrections to November Ballarat Naturalist: p3 Striated *Pardalotes* (not Thornbills); p4 *Caladenia clavigera* Plain-lip Spider Orchid.
- Meeting 4 February 2011: Stephen Murphy, *Designing Sustainable Re-vegetation*, will be held at Prince of Wales Park clubrooms.
- Syllabus 2011-2012: Committee is working on program.
- Genny Binns has topographic maps from op-shop.

**Show and Tell**

- Ken Hammond: Small bird nest found on ground at Cabbage Tree, possibly a Yellow Robin.
- Elspeth Swan: Information about South African Orchid, a weed which has been found in the Ballarat district.

- Greg Binns: Article from Sydney Morning Herald that llamas are being used to guard sheep flocks and bait stations which require wild dogs to pull on a trigger that then squirts poison into the dog's mouth.

### **Field Reports**

- Claire Dalman: Lake Bolac full. Good grassland vegetation on roadsides. Gannets nesting at Portland.
- Paul Norquay: Camera mounted on tree at Mt Egerton did not record Wood Ducks but caught a fox regularly and a Brush-tail Possum.
- Val Hocking: Lake Wendouree has many clutches of Coot; 2 clutches grebe and Black Swan cygnets from very young to nearly fully grown..
- Ken Hammond: Little Crow feeding a Channel-billed Cuckoo in Alice Springs.
- John Gregurke per Fon Ryan: Pair of Brolga have hatched 2 chicks at Lake Learmonth. Swans have successfully breed at Lake Learmonth – first time for at least 60 years.
- John Gregurke: Mt Beckworth - Blue flowering plants: Chocolate Lily, Blue Pincushion, Bluebell and Fairies Aprons. Onion Orchid and Snowy Mint-bush also flowering.

**Syllabus Item:** Rod Orr “Canning Stock Route”. Elspeth Swan thanked Rod and presented him with a gift.

### **Supper**

*(Due to space, minutes have been abbreviated - particularly correspondence received) Editor.*

## **Club Camp 2011**

The Field Naturalists Club of Ballarat camp this year will be at Halls Gap on the weekend of Friday 18 – Sunday 20 November. The Grampians will be colourful with late spring flowers and there are many walks of varying length.

The camp will be based at **Takaru Resort** (formerly Lakeside Caravan Park), Tymna Drive, at the base of the Lake Bellfield dam wall 4km south of Halls Gap. Takaru has a variety of units, cabins, powered sites and camping sites. We will have use of the well-equipped camp kitchen for meals and evening activities. Please book your own accommodation as soon as possible. When booking, remember to say that you are with Field Naturalists Club of Ballarat as there will be a discount which is still to be worked out depending on the numbers attending.

Takaru Resort, PO Box 4, Halls Gap 3381

Phone: Freecall

Email: Website: [www.takaru.com.au](http://www.takaru.com.au)

**Meeting Venue** - The Committee is recommending that we return to our former meeting venue - Primary Industry Training Centre of Ballarat University on the corner of Gregory and Gillies Sts. We will meet there for the MARCH meeting.

# CALENDAR 2011

## FEBRUARY

Fri 4 Stephen Murphy, Environmentalist & Nurseryman—*Designing Sustainable Re-vegetation.*

Sun 6      *Inverleigh Flora & Fauna Reserve*, Friends of Inverleigh F&F Reserve

**MARCH**

Fri 4      **Venue:** Primary Industries Training Centre, cnr Gillies and Gregory  
Sts. **AGM** and Members' Images - *Water— the ultimate resource*

Sun 6      *Mt Warrenheip, Mt Buninyong & Lal Lal Historical Reserve,*  
 Leaders - Club members

Tues 15      6.00pm Committee meeting - Elspeth Swan, Mt Egerton  
BYO picnic tea. **NOTE** change of day and time.

**Nominations are invited for your 2011  
Committee**

★ ★ Nomination forms will be available at the February meeting. ★ ★

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**Committee**

President.....Ms Elspeth Swan

Vice-President.....Mr Greg Binns

Secretary .....Mr John Gregurke

Treasurer .....Mr Les Hanrahan

Mrs Claire Dalman ..... Mrs Carol Hall .....

Mrs Claire Dalman ..... Mrs Carol Hall .....

Mr Peter Dalman ..... Mrs Val Hocking .....

Mr Peter Dalman ..... Mrs Val Hocking .....

Dr Frances Hanrahan ..... Ms Nina Netherway (editor) .....

Dr Frances Hanrahan ..... Ms Nina Netherway (editor) .....

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**Email:** Secretary:-John Gregurke, Editor: Nina Netherway

**Website:** [www.ballarat.yourguide.com.au](http://www.ballarat.yourguide.com.au) Click on *Community>Local Clubs>Environment*

**Meetings** are held at the Prince of Wales Park Clubrooms in Prince of Wales Park, Gillies St on the first Friday of the month at 7.30pm. (Note change for March meeting - see above)

**Excursions:** Leave from the carpark adjacent to BGS & BHS boatsheds at the south end of Forest St.. Wendouree.

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